

01361

1963/00/00

ENCLOSURE 2

THE AIR FORCE RESPONSE TO THE CUBAN CRISIS

Prepared by
USAF Historical Division Liaison Office
Headquarters USAF

Repro Cy 2
of

Copy 12 of 54 copies
(less tabs)

91-59-F(A)

b1

On 18 November CONAD returned its dispersed aircraft to their home bases and reestablished the normal [b1] alert.⁴²

During the period 22 October to 26 November, ADC flew a total of 13,047 sorties—2,800 of them from Florida bases.⁴³

b1

Twenty F-101's were maintained at Homestead AFB until permanent air defense requirements for the 32nd Region were determined.⁴⁴

At the end of October, CINCAFLANT forces included 574 USAF aircraft, 75 Marine, and 43 Navy aircraft.⁴⁵ To exercise the force and maintain crew proficiency, CINCAFLANT on 2 November directed that 20 percent of the aircraft fly daily, and on 8 November took an additional step to prevent degradation of aircraft and crews. A reorganized strike posture placed 328 aircraft on ready alert status to form the first two waves of an initial strike. The remaining 235 aircraft, constituting the third wave, were released for local flying and maintenance, subject to recall for strike within four hours.

On 20 November the President announced the lifting of the quarantine against Cuba in response to a Soviet agreement to remove the IL-28's. Low-level reconnaissance confirmed the dismantling of these aircraft on 24 November. In succeeding days all TAC aircraft and crews were returned to

b1

When the crisis began, USAF air defense forces in the southeast consisted of 4 F-102's at Homestead AFB, 6 RC-121's at McCoy AFB, and two interceptors on alert at Tyndall AFB. Between 19 and 21 October air defenses in Florida were bolstered by the addition of 26 F-102's at Homestead, 24 F-106's at Patrick, and 6 RC-121's at McCoy.⁸ In addition, CONAD requested eight more Hawk battalions and a number of 40-mm units.

b1

7

b1

Deployment of tactical units, equipped with F-100's, F-105's, RF-101's, KB-50's, and RB-66's, to Florida began on 20 October. By 22 October all TAC combat forces, support personnel, equipment, and the minimum munitions required were in place.

b1

b1

USAF airlift was increased to support the combat forces. Beginning 17 October, MATS flew 54 missions to airlift approximately 800 tons of equipment into the area. In a four-day period, beginning 21 October, MATS airlifted 3,600 Marines and 3,200 tons of equipment into Guantanamo, Cuba and the southeastern United States.¹¹

On 17 October DCS/Systems and Logistics, Hq USAF, established a 24-hour Logistics Readiness Center to supervise the prepositioning of critical materiel at southern operating bases. At the request of AFLC, the LOGAIR budget was increased by \$200,000 on 18 October to provide for extra section flights and reroutings.¹²

By midnight 19 October all requirements, with minor exceptions, which did not affect Air Force capability, were in place. Almost 7,000 tons of materiel were airlifted, some from as far away as the Philippines and Turkey. Major items shipped included 3,849 750-lb bombs, 1,854 GAM-83's, 2.7 million rounds of 20-mm ammunition, 1,548 fire bombs, 33,765 2.75" rockets, 2,219 launchers, 1,440 CSU bombs, and 1,020 fuel tanks and pylons.¹³ The airlift proved to be inadequate to move the entire tonnage, such as heavy fire trucks and vans, which were sent by road.¹⁴ Logistic support for the [b1] SAC airborne alert was excellent--the result of an on-shelf spares program approved and funded by Congress, and AFLC's up-to-date readiness plan and timely support actions.¹⁵

Increasing the Alert

b1

b1


Earlier, by the morning of 23 October, the Oplan 312 tactical strike force was on [b1] alert and capable of going immediately to a higher stage of readiness. On the 26th TAC began low-level reconnaissance over Cuba which disclosed additional targets and resulted in air offensive planning [

b1

As of 26 October CINCAFLANT had 579 aircraft in his attack force.²⁴
 On 28 October all alert crews were on standby status in the operations ready rooms, and external power plants were connected to the aircraft.²⁵
 Sixteen F-100's, armed with LAU rockets, were ready to attack specific SAM sites in retaliation for loss of reconnaissance aircraft.* On this same date, low-level reconnaissance verified the start of dismantling of the missile sites.²⁶

MATS was responsible for the entire troop drop capability in the event of an invasion of Cuba. C-124 training was stepped up with the first indication of the heightening of the Cuban crisis and a crash program was instituted to provide equipment. By 30 October, 228 crews were combat ready and the equipping program was complete.²⁷

To overcome a major deficiency in ballistic missile warning for the southeastern area, Hq USAFE on 23 October directed that the FPS-49 EMEWS tracking radar at Moorestown, N.J., be placed on 24-hour operation to provide detection capability for missiles launched from Cuba. On the 24th radar trackers at Laredo, Tex., and Thomasville, Ga., were aligned for missile warning. By 29 October the system was operational, with Navy picket ships tied into the air defense net for added low-level coverage.²⁸

Following initiation of the naval quarantine on 24 October, CINCLANT requested Air Force assistance in locating and identifying shipping. 

b1

*The previous day, 27 October, a U-2 piloted by Maj. Rudolph Anderson was shot down over Cuba while on a reconnaissance mission. Major Anderson was killed.

b1

On the 24th, the USAF Weather Service, the Air Photographic and Charting Service, and elements of the SAC B-52 airborne alert force were directed to begin surveillance. On the 25th, Operations Blue Banner and Baby Bonnet began, involving scanning the seas in the blockade zone by 16 KC-97's and five RB-47's. Low-level reconnaissance of Cuba also was stepped up on 26 October with initiation of RF-101 missions and two daily MATS weather data flights.³⁰

The Air Force on 28 October recalled and assigned to TAC more than 14,000 air reservists. They manned 21 C-119 troop carrier squadrons, 3 C-123 troop carrier squadrons, and 6 aerial port squadrons, together with associated headquarters and support units. Earlier, starting on 23 October, significant numbers of Air Force reserve recovery groups and squadrons reported for voluntary duty, principally in support of SAC, TAC, and ADC.³¹

During the critical days of 22-26 October, Hq USAF acted to insure that sufficient ammunition was available. The Lake City Ordnance Plant, Ogden, Utah, was placed on a three-shift seven-day week to produce 20mm cartridges; the Army was requested to accelerate production of CEU-1/A and CEU-2/A munitions; and AFLC arranged to have 3,000 5" Zuni rockets—borrowed from the Navy—in place at Homestead AFB by 30 October.³²

Maintaining the Alert

From 29 October through the end of November, Air Force contingency

An RB-47 can "sweep" a path 200 miles wide at a speed of 1,000 mph.

actions were devoted primarily to maintaining the alert force, and preserving simultaneously the overall capability of USAF's combat commands. Continual re-evaluation of the Oplans.

b 1

On 2

November, following JCS instructions, the Air Staff cancelled all planning and preparations for Oplan 314-61, except for portions of the plan applicable to Oplan 316. The Air Staff also speeded action to increase the force structure and the number of designated operating bases well above Oplans 312 and 316 initial requirements.³⁴

On the last day of October, SAC further increased its deterrent umbrella by boosting the B-47 Reflex alert force by 22 aircraft, and on 1 November deployed 86 KC-97's to three overseas bases, upgrading approximately one-fourth of the dispersed B-47 fleet to first-cycle bomber status.³⁵ SAC's immediate execution capability reached a peak by 4 November, with a striking power more than double that of 19 October. It included 1,479 strike aircraft, compared to the earlier 652; 162 ICBM's, compared to 112; 2,952 weapons, compared to 1,422; and 1,003 tankers compared to 358.³⁶ Between 23 October and 26 November, SAC tactical aircraft made 2,511 flights (with a total of 8,101 weapons aboard) without an accident. By 15 November, however, adjustments were necessary to prevent degradation of crew proficiency and inventory. Combat Crew Training Schools were resumed, to insure limited training for each combat crew.³⁷

b 1

their home stations with the exception of a small residual force of fighter, tanker, and reconnaissance aircraft maintained at Key West NAS and McCoy AFB.⁴⁶

During the October-November crisis AFLC accelerated depot level maintenance and returned to SAC approximately 130 P-52, KC-135, and B-47 aircraft within a three week period. AFLC also prepositioned the following petroleum supplies: 612,000 barrels of jet fuel, 521,000 barrels of aviation gasoline, and 276,000 gallons of aircraft engine lubricating oil. The value of these products was \$2.5 million, \$3.6 million, and \$1.5 million, respectively. As of 24 November, AFLC had moved about 170,000 tons at a cost of a little over \$2 million. LOGAIR flew 685,000 miles, carrying 1,975 tons at a cost of \$650,000. Movement by commercial surface totaled 167,845 tons at a cost of \$518,000. Obligations as of 31 October were \$142,300 for aircraft appropriation, \$487,000 for other procurement appropriation, and \$2,831,900 for POL.⁴⁷

MATS ADVON, established on 29 October at Langley AFB to support airlift requirements, was discontinued on 10 November with establishment of a new Hq ADVON at Homestead AFB. In all, MATS deployed 3,943 personnel in support of emergency requirements and provided an additional 367 for TAC augmentation. As of 10 November, 517 MATS aircraft and 563 TAC aircraft were available to support existing operational requirements.⁴⁸

On 29 November the Secretary of Defense approved the following criteria for a continued alert posture:⁵

b1

61

Conclusion

The Air Force response to the Cuban crisis was outstanding. Problems and deficiencies, however, were revealed in materiel, communications, personnel, and airlift areas. Information was lacking on the status of reserve forces, and there was inadequate coordination and knowledge of the related war plans of the several major commands. Despite these obstacles, the Air Force mustered its strategic and tactical strength within hours and was ready to meet any kind of contingency.

On 7 December 1962 President Kennedy in particular credited SAC with contributing greatly "to the maintenance of the peace and security of the United States and those countries associated with us." The President was referring to the SAC deterrent forces--the strategic umbrella which had enabled him to invoke a naval quarantine and force a Soviet retreat through application of a relatively low order of military power. In this connection, General Power, citing the critical nature of the Soviet threat from Cuba, pointed out that invoking the deterrent power of SAC had depended on warning of sufficient length to launch the ground alert force. The Soviet missiles on Cuban soil had posed an immediate threat to this capability. Although the threat was finally removed, General Power noted there was a continuing danger of attack by missiles launched from submarines or fired over the South Pole. He warned that the only secure forces were airborne alert

aircraft and although hardened missiles, which do not require warning, were coming in, the need for warning will continue into the future.

The specific performance, strengths and weaknesses of SAC and the other major commands, as they were revealed during the Cuban crisis, are summarized in the tabs attached to this report.

TACTICAL AIR COMMAND*

The increasing seriousness of the Cuban situation during the summer of 1962 alerted the Tactical Air Command to the necessity of preparing a well-planned, thoroughly coordinated tactical air offensive to be launched against Cuba well in advance of an airborne assault and amphibious landing. JCS planning had made no provision for such an operation. On 7 September Cmdr TAC established a working group to develop such a plan and on 11 September he briefed and won approval for the concept from CIRCSTRIKE. On 27 September the plan was presented to the Chief of Staff, USAF. It was approved and 20 October was assigned as the date when all implementation preparations would be completed. Cmdr TAQ was directed by the Chief of Staff to offer the plan to CINCLANT with the assurance of full Air Force support. On 28 September Cmdr TAC briefed CINCLANT and offered to serve as the Air Force Component Commander (CINCAFLANT) for all planning and execution action. The proposal was immediately accepted and within 48 hours the plan was officially designated as CINCLANT Oplan 312. CINCAFLANT was provided control of target allocation, priority of attack, and operational control of all air forces--including Naval air--conducting operations against Cuba with the exception of those to be employed in the defense of Guantanamo. By 10 October TAC forces had already commenced training exercises at McCoy, MacDill, and Homestead AFB's and the build-up of war readiness materiel at these bases had begun. The JCS were formally briefed and approved Oplan 312 on 20 October.

Problem Areas and Lessons Learned

1. Although the proximity of LANT, AFLANT, and ARLANT Headquarters in the Norfolk, Va., area facilitated inter-command coordination, these headquarters were too far from the combat zone if the Oplans had been executed. Accordingly, AFLANT and ARLANT and ADVON Headquarters were established at Homestead AFB and it was envisaged that CINCAFLANT and CINCARLANT would move to the ADVON's in time to execute Oplan 312. CINCLANT planned to remain in the Norfolk area, except for brief visits, until execution of Oplan 316 was imminent.
2. The concentration of several wings on each of the Florida bases--some bases housing fighter, tanker and reconnaissance units--created difficulties.

*Based on Rpt by TAC, Highly Compressed Narrative Account and Assessment of "Tactical Air Command the Cuban Crisis," attach to ltr, M/Gen Walter E. Arnold, C/S, TAC to Hq USAF (AFCHO), 7 Jan 63, subj: The Air Force in the Cuban Crisis.

To resolve the problem, provisional air divisions (reporting to CINCPACFLT) were established at Homestead, McCoy, and MacDill AFB's to exercise operational control of all TAC force at these stations and to insure proper support of the tactical units by the organizations permanently assigned to the bases.

3. During the early days of the low-level reconnaissance missions, the execution order to launch reconnaissance aircraft was frequently received too late in the day to insure good photography. This was because execution orders were deferred until the previous day's photography had been analyzed by the Secretary of Defense and the President. Measures were taken to provide faster reaction: a Tactical Reconnaissance Center was established at MacDill AFB; an air courier system was inaugurated to speed delivery of photographs to Washington and the strike forces; the Reconnaissance Operations Center at AFLANT Headquarters was strengthened; and procedures established permitting simultaneous receipt of reconnaissance execution orders by all agencies concerned. The combination of all these measures substantially advanced the reconnaissance capability and proficiency of TAC.

4. Undermanning in certain activity fields presented difficulties in maintaining the required 24-hour alert schedule. Despite a 200-man augmentation at Hq TAC, the average officer worked a 15-hour day seven days a week. Crew authorizations in fighter and troop carrier wings were too low to sustain the required alert status and to accomplish, simultaneously, the required operational sorties and maintain the desired training program. TAC fighter wings were undermanned in the security, armament, and communications areas. The resources of other commands had to be used extensively to meet minimum requirements at the Florida bases.

5. There were too few TAC units permanently stationed in Florida to provide a satisfactory base of support for the number of units deployed to the area during the crisis. Despite SAC evacuation of its bases and the availability of some space at Key West, conditions were so crowded on the available bases that only minimum dispersion of aircraft and munitions was possible.
6. TAC lacked an initial authorization for war reserve conventional munitions, wing tanks, napalm tanks, and pylons, thereby necessitating the build-up of these supplies at the expense of overseas commands.
7. TAC possessed inadequate photographic intelligence of potential Cuban targets and lacked high-resolution aerial cameras and efficient photo-processing equipment which limited its ability to produce quality target photography in a timely manner.